

# SELECTED QUR'ANIC VERSES ON ISLAMICJERUSALEM AND THEIR EXEGESIS

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**ABSTRACT:** *Islamicjerusalem has been mentioned in the Quran in a number of contexts as it has been the main geographical theatre for many of the Quranic stories. The paper deals with a number of Quranic verses that make explicit and indirect reference to al-Aqsa Mosque, the walled city and the region around it. It investigates contended exegesis of some Quranic verses on whether Bayt al-Maqdis is referred to or not. The verses selected pertain to events that happened prior to the seventh century, as well as an event that took place at the beginning of the Prophethood of Muhammad. In addition to references to events that will take place in the future, which Islamicjerusalem is at the centre of. This is besides a number of verses that are of general nature and do not refer to a specific event as such. A number of exegetical works from different schools of Tafsir were selected to give a wide spectrum of opinions on the possible relation to Islamicjerusalem.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Quran, Tafsir, exegesis, al-Aqsa Mosque, prophets, Israelites, Byzantine-Persian wars, Day of Judgment, Holy Land, Palestine, Zionist Orientalism.*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The Quran mentions many places and locations, and much of the Quranic stories are about events that took places within the land of *Bayt al-Maqdis* or Islamicjerusalem. A third of the Quran consists of stories of Prophets; the majority of whom were born, dwelled, visited, migrated to, ruled or died on this blessed land. The Qur'an mentions only two mosques by name explicitly, the

Sacred Mosque in Makkah and Al-Aqsa Mosque in IslamicJerusalem. It also refers to regions such as the *Haram* of Makkah and two regions which Al-Aqsa Mosque is the centre of; “The Holy Land” and “The Land of Barakah”. The Quran also talks about Al-Aqsa Mosque as the first Qibla as well as referring to its centrality in events that are to come before the Day of Judgment.

There are some modern claims, as part of a Zionist propaganda to undermine the importance of Jerusalem in Islam, that *Jerusalem was not mentioned even once in the Qur’an, while it has been mentioned in the Torah hundreds of times* (Hasson 1996: 352-353; Booker 2008: 108, 192; Klein nd: 15). This paper will illustrate that there is frequent mention of Bayt al-Maqdis in the Qur’an; sometimes verses specifically refer to its mosque, in other verses to the city, and in some occasions, the whole region is denoted.

There has been a disagreement between scholars in both the past and in present, with regards to some verses and what is implied by them. This study will only relate to disputed exegesis of verses on IslamicJerusalem. This paper will be divided into two main sections, starting with the most common verses referring to IslamicJerusalem, and investigate the selected verses from a range of exegetical works. This is besides briefly explaining what is meant by IslamicJerusalem, and discussing different exegetical methods. Some verses have been eliminated in the course of this study, because of the amount of information that is needed to cover them from historical to geographical accepts.<sup>2</sup> For each verse, a brief background to the verse will be given, followed by the different exegesis of the verse in relation to IslamicJerusalem, and finally presenting possible interpretations.

### **IslamicJerusalem**

*Bayt al-Maqdis* (IslamicJerusalem) is the Muslim name for the city and its region. Many people mistake this to mean the mosque or the walled city, while it has been established to be a much larger region, with a combination of towns and villages. This is explained clearly by al-Maqdisi (d. 390AH/ 1000AD), who gives a detailed description of Bayt al-Maqdis and its region (al-Maqdisi

1906: 173). The main cities included within this region are: Jerusalem, Ramla, Lud, Jaffa, Jericho, Bethlehem, Hebron, Kuseifa and Nablus in today's Palestine, and Ma'āb, Karak and Ghor al-Safi in Jordan. This region corresponds with the boundaries of the Holy Land within Islamic source (El-Awaisi 2007: 273-275). The existence of this region is also apparent in the exegetical works, as will be seen in the course of this paper.

### Verses on Islamic Jerusalem

There are many verses in the Qur'an that refer to Islamic Jerusalem directly and indirectly; at least there are forty verses that scholars have explicitly related to Islamic Jerusalem. Most commonly used verse will be mentioned in this section. It is important to note within the Quranic context most of the Prophets mentioned in the seventh century Quran have a direct association with Bayt al-Maqdis. In fact, the main geographical theatre for the Quranic stories and events has been the land of Islamic Jerusalem, referred to in the Quran as the Holy Land or the Land of Barakah.

The most common verse used in relation to the importance of this Holy Land to Muslims is associated to the last messenger, Muhammad, and his nocturnal Journey to Al-Aqsa Mosque. The first verse of Chapter al-Isra (the Night Journey), makes mention of this journey and refers to the Mosque and the region around it.

Glory to Whom took His Servant on a journey by night from Al-Haram Mosque to Al-Aqsa Mosque which we have surrounded with Barakah, in order to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing. (Qur'an 17:1)

This Journey establishes the connection between the new Muslims in Makkah and Al-Aqsa Mosque, which for ten years prior to this journey was the *Qiblah* they faced in their prayers (El-Awaisi 2007: 88; Al-Rabi 2009: 1-26). Reference to Al-Aqsa being the first Qiblah is mentioned in the second chapter of the Quran;

And We did not prescribe the Qiblah which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his two heels..." (Qur'an 2: 143).

Other verses make mention of this land before the Night Journey; *the Land of Barakah* or *al-Ard al-lati Baraknā fiha* was introduced in the Qur'an in the early stage of Islam in Makkah well before the migration to Madinah. Five verses refer to this area; one relates to the mosque revealed in *al-Isrā'* (the Night Journey). The other four relate to the land, which were revealed mainly before *al-Isrā'*. They refer to the Israelites' inheritance (Qur'an 7:137), the route of the people of Saba' (Sheba) (Qur'an 34:18), Prophet Abraham's migration (Qur'an 21:71) and Prophet Solomon's travels and base (Qur'an 21:81). There are many other verses revealed in Makkah that refer to parts of Islamicjerusalem, such as chapter al-Tin (Qur'an 95), which was one of the early revelations. According to many exegetes *al-Zaytun* (the Olive) refers to Bayt al-Maqdis (al-Ṭabarī 1999, v.12:632-3; al-Zamakhsharī 1995, v.4:763; Ibn Kathīr 1997, v.4:452). Following this, more verses were revealed about the stories of previous Prophets who dwelt in this land; the majority of the Prophetic stories were, in general, revealed in Makkah before the migration to Madinah. Some of the verses, however, name and refer to specific sites within the region, as was the case with some of the sites in relation to where Prophet Jesus and his Mother lived. There is a reference to some sites as *makanan sharqiyā* (an eastern place) (Qur'an 19:16), *makanan Qasiyā* (a faraway place) (Qur'an 19:22), *rabwatin thati qararin wa ma'in* (a high place with meadows and flowing springs) (Qur'an 23:50), and so on. One chapter that was revealed half way during the Makkan period was Chapter Al-Rum (Qur'an 30). It was revealed following the Persian victory over the Romans (Byzantines) in the year 614CE in *Adna al-Ard* around the area of Islamicjerusalem and it predicts a forthcoming victory of the Byzantines over the Persians (Qur'an 30:1-4).

Other verses refer to events close to the hereafter, when the trumpet will sound. The Qur'an refers to the place where this is to happen as a *makanin Qarib* (a place nearby) (Qur'an 50:41). Many scholars of exegesis take it to be Bayt al-Maqdis and specifically the Rock of Bayt al-Maqdis (al-Ṭabarī 1999, v.11:438-9; al-Samarqandī 1997, v.4:383; al-Zamakhsharī 1997, v.3:323). From these verses, it is clear that well before the *al-Isrā'* a framework was in place in

relation to Islamic Jerusalem; the Quran talked about this blessed area, which had many Prophets dwelling within its region. The Quran linked the hearts of early Muslims to this land spiritually through these verses as well as physically through their direction of prayer on a daily basis both before and after *al-Isrā'*, from the early stages of Islam (El-Awaisi 2007: 91-92).

More verses relating to this area were revealed after *al-Isrā'* (al-Zuhrī 1988:37-42). One was the introduction of the name al-Aqsa Mosque to refer to the Mosque of Bayt al-Maqdis. There are other verses which tell, for example, the story of Prophet Joseph in *Ghayābat al-Jub* (the bottom of the well) which he was thrown into within the vicinity of Bayt al-Maqdis. In the same story, there is in addition, a reference to Prophet Joseph's family dwelling: in *al-Badr* (the desert) (Qur'an 12:100), which was also in the vicinity of Bayt al-Maqdis. These verses mention different sites within Islamic Jerusalem, and mainly give descriptive information of such places.

In addition to the Makkan Qur'anic terminology "*Land of Barakah*", a further term was introduced in the Qur'an, *al-Ard al-Muqadasah* (Holy Land). This would have occurred towards the end of the Prophet's life as chapter al-Ma'idah (Quran 5) was revealed in Madinah and was one of the last chapters to be revealed (al-Zarkashī 1998, v.1: 194). It refers to the Israelites after the Exodus when they were asked to enter the *al-Ard al-Muqadasah* Holy Land, in a clear address from Prophet Moses to his people after they had left Egypt. The Quran explains how they rejected this command and were thus destined to the wilderness for forty years (Qur'an 5:26). They did not return to Egypt, nor did their offspring who were only able to conquer parts of the Holy Land after the forty years' ban had passed; later, at the time of King Saul and Prophet David were they able to enter the land. Reference to the River Jordan is made, where Saul orders his men not to drink except for one sip from the river, but they fail except for a few (Qur'an 2:249). Following that David is made a Prophet after defeating Goliath and later his son. The King Prophet Solomon is given the power of the wind transporting him back and forth from the Land of Barakah (Qur'an 21:81).

The Quran also mentions promises to the Children of Israel in ruling this land as well as their destruction twice, through ascending high with corruption in this land (Qur'an 17: 4-5). The Quran again makes reference to the first destruction and how the city had fallen down upon its turrets (Quran 2: 259). The second is mentioned in reference to the future where firstly the faces of the Children of Israel shall be disgraced and then believers will enter the mosque, as they entered it the first time, and to shatter all that they ascended to with a shattering (Qur'an 17: 7). The Qur'an also talks about this land in reference to future events in relation to the Day of Judgment. One verse is understood by exegetists to refer to the eastern gate of al-Aqsa Mosque separating bliss from punishment on the day of judgement (Qur'an 57:13).

From the above verses, it is clear that the verses are referring not just to the mosque but to two wider regions, the Holy Land and the Land of Barakah. These can be understood by trying to map where these events might have taken place, such as the migration of prophets Abraham and Lut, which are taken by Muslim scholars to refer to somewhere within the region of Islamic Jerusalem, namely Hebron for Prophet Abraham and the southern part of the Dead Sea basin for Prophet Lut. The same can be mapped out for other prophets who dwelled within parts of this blessed land, where al-Aqsa plays a central role in their narrative.

### Exegesis of the Qur'an

The Qur'an to Muslims is the divine word of God, which governs most aspects of the Muslim life. It is a well-known fact that the Makkan tribe *Quraysh* initially rejected it together with the whole message of Islam. They were asking the prophet for miracles to prove that he was a messenger of God (Qur'an 17:90-93).<sup>3</sup> The Qur'an was a miracle in itself, as it came down in their own rich language, and challenged their confidence. One of the most important matters with regards to the Qur'an is to understand its meanings. The Science of Qur'anic interpretation is one of the most important sciences in Islam, without it, there will be an ambiguity in understanding Quranic verses. Therefore, Muslims have taken a great interest in this, from a very early time. This

explains the huge number of exegetical works of the Qur'an. There were many methods of exegesis undertaken by Muslim scholars throughout the last fourteen centuries. Those can be divided into four main methods (al-Qatan 2000: 325-377):

1. Traditional: the exegesis by al-Ma'thour (which include: 'Qur'an by Qur'an', 'Qur'an by Sunnah' and the sayings of the prophet's companions).
2. Rational: the exegesis by individual opinion.
3. Juristic: using Qur'anic verses to support their argument for a juristic ruling.
4. Modern: mostly uses the previous methods and try to implement it in our present time.

For the purpose of this paper, a selection of complete exegesis were chosen that cover all the above methods. Al-Tabari (d. 310AH/ 922AD) and Ibn Kathir (d. 774AH/ 1372AD) were selected to represent the traditional school, whilst Al-Qurtubi (d. 688AH/ 1289AD) for the juristic based school and Al-Razi (d. 606AH/ 1210AD) for the rational school. As for the Modern exegetical works, Qutb and Maududi were selected. Also, other works of certain scholars will be covered, where necessary, as well as the use of *Asbab al-Nuzul* (reasons for revelation) where applicable.

### Selected Verses

As mentioned earlier a number of verses were selected where some disagreement over the exegesis exist. Thus, not all verses that relate to Islamic Jerusalem will be discussed, only a selection of contested verses. This selection will include verses on Mary and Jesus, Solomon and the Valley of Ants, the first destruction of Jerusalem, the defeat of the Byzantines in the seventh century, houses of God, the Land of the Fig and Olive, and the place of blowing the trumpet for the Day of Judgment. Special attention will be on the geographical location within exegesis of these verses, to see the relation with Islamic Jerusalem.

### ***Mary and Jesus***

The Quran dedicates a full chapter to Mary or Maryam, where her story together with that of her son is retold within the Islamic framework as well as that of Zachariah and John. Verse 22 in chapter Maryam, the 43<sup>rd</sup> chapter revealed in Makkah (al-Zuhrī 1988: 37-42), discusses how she withdrew after conceiving her child to a remote place to give birth.

So, she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a place far off.  
(Qur'an 19: 22)

Al-Tabari states that after Gabriel blow into the top of the garment, which she was wearing, she thus became pregnant, and went to a place away from people for the delivery. The Arabic word for “a place far off” is *qasyā*, which al-Tabari discusses from a linguistic point of view. From the narrations, it was said to be a far remote location, but al-Tabari does not point to this exact location (al-Tabari 1999, Vol8: 318-320). Ibn Kathir agrees with the meaning of *qasyā* and specifies locations through more than one narration, but he favours the narration that it was in Bethlehem, because of stronger evidence (Ibn Kathir 2000: 821-823). Al-Qurtubi also accepts Bethlehem as the location for the birth of Jesus (al-Qurtubi 1964 Vol11:94). Al-Razi does not specify the place and only points to the fact that there is a difference of opinion over this, and briefly states them, he sums them up in being; the furthest point in the House, behind a mountain or that she travelled to another region. He also adds another narration from Ibn Abbas that after she gave birth she stayed in a cave for forty days before coming back to her people (al-Razi 2000, Vol21: 170-174). Maududi agrees with Ibn Kathir and al-Qurtubi and states that this far-off place was Bethlehem, and adds that this is only natural for Maryam, as she was not a married woman, and if she stayed in the same place, then it would have caused her a lot of discomfort from what the people will say about her (Maududi, 2001: 152-154).

It seems from the above discussion that Bethlehem in Bayt al-Maqdis is the strongest opinion amongst exegetists.<sup>4</sup> This might have been influenced by a tradition of the prophet, that Gabriel asked him to stop on the way to pray in Bethlehem, the birthplace

of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> It is also where the Christians believe Jesus was born, although there is a difference as in the Christian tradition he was born in a stable and within the Quranic narrative he was born out in the open, next to a trunk of a palm tree and a spring of water.

There are many other verses about Jesus and his birth and his life within the Quran, but another verse that mentions a location is chapter al-Mu'minun, 78<sup>th</sup> chapter to be revealed in Makkah (al-Zuhri 1988: 37-42),

And We made the son of Maryam and his mother as a Sign: We gave them both *rabwa* (shelter on high ground), *thati qarain wama'een* (affording rest and security and furnished with springs).. (Qur'an 23: 50)

Al-Tabari explains what is meant by *rabwa* linguistically, is a place that is raised high from the ground. The other word *ma'een* means running water. He states that there are differences of opinion on the location of this. Those opinions were said to be: Ramlah, Damascus, Egypt, and Bayt al-Maqdis. Al-Tabari does not have any preference, but he eliminates Ramlah, and states it is a place that is a levelled plain, with no running water (al-Tabari 1999, Vol9: 217-220). Ibn Kathir also discusses the confusions between the scholars, but then draws the conclusion to Bayt al-Maqdis, and he uses the verse in another chapter (Qur'an 19:24) as evidence, that when she gave birth she had a flowing stream beneath her (Ibn Kathir 2000: 914-915). As for al-Qurtubi, he does not favour a place like al-Tabari, but he adds that *ma'een* could mean a water spring (al-Qurtubi 1964 Vol12:126-127). Maududi gives the Christian account that Mary and Jesus had to flee outside the region twice, to protect him while he was a kid, the first time to Egypt in the reign of Herod and the second time was to Nazareth (Maududi, 2001: 101-102).

As can be seen from the above discussion there is confusion to where this place is. For those who say it was Ramlah, the researcher agrees with al-Tabari to eliminate it, as al-Maqdisi talks about the unavailability of water in the city, and also during the winter it is full of mud, and in the summer full of sand (al-Maqdisi 1906: 164-165). Which means it is not raised from the ground, as the Quran describes, and it does not have water, which means it

does not fit the Quranic criteria. As for Egypt, there are parts of it that would fit the criteria, and as for Damascus, it would also fit as well as Nazareth. But the researcher tends to accept the argument of Ibn Kathir that it was Bayt al-Maqdis, as within this region there are many cities that would fit this criterion, one of which is suggested by Ibn Kathir to be Bethlehem. As the verse does not refer to a place that they had to flee to, but rather it was talking about the place where they resided. There is a modern suggestion that this could refer to a place 15 Km south of Al-Aqsa Mosque, in the monastery of Mar Saba, where Fawaqa claims that it fits the Quranic criterion with an ancient Palm tree and a spring of water (Fawaqa 2000).

### ***The Valley of Ants***

This valley is mentioned in reference to the Kingdom of Prophet Solomon, who had the power over the wind to take him back and forth to the Land of Barakah (Qur'an 21: 81). The story in a chapter dedicated to this story, Surat al-Naml (the Ants), starts with Solomon's father Prophet David and then moves to talk about Prophet Solomon, who was taught to understand the language of the birds and is given many powers by God. After assembling his troops of Jinn, men and bird they marched approaching the Valley of Ants:

When they came to the Valley of the Ants, an ant said, 'O ants, enter your dwellings, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you while they are unaware!' (Qur'an 27: 18)

Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir give no explanation of where this valley is and just concentrated on the conversation. Al-Qurtubi on the other hand, discusses the whole story at length and even gives possible names of the valley; with regard to the location he suggests two places, a valley in al-Sham or a valley in al-Taif close to Makkah (al-Qurtubi 1964, vol13:169). Al-Razi accepts that it is in Syria (al-Razi 2000, Vol24: 161). Maududi accepts that it was in Syria, and give two narrations of Qatadah and Muqatil supporting this argument. Maududi completely rejects some modern claims, which says it was not ants, but rather a human from the tribe of *naml*, which he refutes completely. He also mentions that this is mentioned in the Jewish tradition and that Solomon then

destroyed the whole Valley of Ants (Maududi, 2001 vol7: 147-148). Many others accept that this valley is within Historical Syria, as mentioned by many geographers, close to the city of 'Asqalān/Ascalon where there is a valley close to it named *wadi al-Naml*, the valley of ants (al-Ḥamawī, Y. 1995 vol5: 346; Ibn Battuta 1996 vol1: 254; al-Qazwini nd: 279).

### ***A City in Ruins***

In chapter al-Isra (Quran 17), reference is made to the first corruption of the Children of Israel and it is widely accepted their destruction came at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. In a later chapter revealed in Madinah, it mentions a man, whom the Quran does not name, passing by a city which was in complete ruins. He asked if this city would come back to life again and God tests him through putting him to sleep for one century;

Or like the one who passed through a town and it had fallen into utter ruins. He said: 'how can Allah bring this into life now that it is dead?'. So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him... (Qur'an 2:259)

There are different arguments by exegetists on the identity of this man; however, most of them agree on the city that he passed. Al-Tabari gives many different narrations that the city is Bayt al-Maqdis and that it was after the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar sacked the city of Jerusalem. Al-Tabari relates this through a number of narrators; Qatadah, Ikrima, Wahb and al-Rabi'. And mentions when this man passed through the city, it was completely empty of its people (al-Tabari 1999 Vol3: 29-47). Ibn Kathir argues that the man is from the children of Israel and the city is Bayt al-Maqdis and this incident was after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city, killed and vacated from its inhabitants. He also indicates that the roofs and the walls of the city fell to the ground as this man was contemplating what has happened to the city after great civilisations dwelled in it, thus he asks how will God ever bring this city back to life again after its destruction and thus God causes him to die for one hundred years and the city is re-inhabited and rebuilt, at which God raised him back to life and he saw the city come back to life again (Ibn Kathir 2000: 188-189). Al-Qurtubi initially explains what is meant by *Al-Qari'a* (the town),

linguistically being the place where people meet. Then he discusses who this man is and like al-Tabari he gives many different opinions. As for the city, he agrees that it is the city of Bayt al-Maqdis, and he narrates it through similar narrations of al-Tabari. As for the word *Khawijya* he discusses it from a linguistic point of view and arrives at the conclusion that it means emptied from its people (al-Qurtubi 1964, vol3: 288-290).

Al-Razi on the other hand discusses whom this man is, giving two opinions one he was a pagan and the other, which he accepts, is that he was a believer. He also accepts that this happened after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and burned the Torah (al-Razi 2000, Vol7: 25-26). Qutb takes a different view and does not give a location for this town, as he states that the location is not important in this case, otherwise the Qur'an would not have overlooked it. Even if it was known it would add very little to the impact and significance of the story (Qutb 1991 vol1: 299). Although Qutb does not consider the place where this might have taken place, most exegetists do not doubt this to be referring to the city of Bayt al-Maqdis.

### ***Defeat of Byzantines***

Previous verses are of events that preceded the seventh century Quran, while this event of the defeat of the Byzantines by the Persian was contemporary to the Quran. The Quran dedicates a chapter to this event, al-Rum chapter 30, revealed in Makkah after 614. This chapter comes after the victory of the Persians over the Byzantines in what the Quran calls *Adna al-Ard*. After which they were driven out of this region, forcing the Byzantine emperor to flee to Constantinople, where he was besieged, before regaining the upper hand over the Persians, and defeating them, as predicted by the Quran (al-Suyuti 1889: 338-339).

*Alif lam mim. The Romans have been vanquished in the nearer [part of the] land. But they, after their vanquishing shall be the victors in a few years. To God belongs the command before and after, and on that day, the believers shall rejoice in God's help. He helps whomever He will; and He is the Mighty, the Merciful. The promise of God. God does not fail His promise, but most people are not aware. (Qur'an 30: 1-5)*

Al-Tabari narrates over twenty different narrations on this topic. He takes the word *adna* to mean nearest, he mentions many possibilities but he seems to favour the nearest land from Syria to Persia (al-Tabari 1999: 162-170). Ibn Kathir on the other hand looks at the many narrations and concludes for the place of the battle he suggests that it was between Adhra'āt and Busra, the closest land of Syria to Arabia (Ibn Kathir 2000: 1047-1051). Al-Qurtubi quotes the traditions mentioned by al-Tabari, adding a line of poetry by Imru' al-Qais (al-Qurtubi 1964, vol4:14):

تتوراتها من أذرعَات وأهلها      يشرب أدنى دارها نظر عال

This explains that what is meant here is the nearest land. He refers Athra'āt (Daraa) as being the nearest land to the Arabs in Arabia and Madinah in particular. Al-Razi for the place of defeat agrees with al-Qurtubi, he also takes it from a linguistic point of view, and explains that the definitive article (*al*) used in *al-Ard* the land, here refers to the land which is known to them, in this case the land of the Arabs. Which would mean that the Romans were defeated in part of their land that is closest to the land of the Arabs (al-Razi 2000, Vol25: 84-86). As for Qutb, he does not refer to what is meant by *adna al-Ard* at all (Qutb 1991 vol5: 2756-2758). But amongst modern Muslim scholars such al-Zindani and al-Najjar they refer to another linguistic meaning of *adna* adding the meaning lower rather than closer. Thus, *adna al-Ard* being the lowest part on earth, in reference to the Dead Sea basin (al-Zindani 2004: 93; al-Musslih 2008: 193-198), a place close to Jericho where this decisive battle took place.

*Adna al-Ard* as was discussed; there are three classical opinions, and one modern of where this place is:

1. Al-Jazeera, Mesopotamia, the nearest land of the Romans to Persia.
2. Athra'āt (Daraa), the land between Arabia and *al-Sham*, and is the nearest land to Makkah.
3. Jordan and Palestine – not the current geographical boundaries.
4. The Dead Sea basin.

Linguistically, the second opinion may be favoured, as the Qur'an was addressing the Makkans, and thus the land of the Romans

closest to them, this is supported by the line of poetry, which was said before the time of the prophet. But historically there is little evidence of a decisive battle taking place in that area (Baynes 1948, Khan 1992; Lowden 1997; Ostrogorsky 1956; Jenkins 1966: 19). As for the location of these two old cities, they are both located in the south of Syria today, to the borders of Jordan. Adhra'at has many names, in the Old Testament it is mentioned as Idra'ai, while Arab geographers call it Adhra'at, and today it is known as Daraa. Busra is an ancient city and still keeps its name until today, as Busra al-Sham. The first and third opinion, have had numerous battles, and because of the change in boundaries, and names of some towns or villages, it was very hard to tell, which area is referred to, this would also need a study on its own to study the historical boundaries and historical names. As for the fourth opinion, which is *adna al-Ard* meaning the lowest, this is a modern reading of the Quran based on science, namely geology.

Looking up some verses in the Qur'an, in most cases it means the nearest (such as Quran 53: 8-9), others it means less (such as Quran 58:7), and other it means low (Quran 2: 61 and 7:42). Geologically the Dead Sea and the area around it is the lowest part on earth, the question is: did the Persians defeat the Romans there? Those who use this argument, say the battle happened there, but they provide no evidence, on the date nor the exact location.<sup>6</sup> They only refer to a tradition by one companion of the prophet that it was in Bayt al-Maqdis, who differed on the location. Bayt al-Maqdis geographically is not just the city, rather a whole region, which also includes parts of the Dead Sea, thus this may be a possibility, but would need further investigation.

### ***Houses of Zikr***

Some exegetists take the reference of the mosques to be that of Bayt al-Maqdis in reference to verse 36 in chapter An-Nur, revealed in Madinah. The preceding verse talks about the light of God, as a lamp, which is lit from the blessed tree, the olive tree from the Holy Land, as understood by some exegetist, as it referred to as neither easterly nor westerly. The subsequent verse then discusses houses dedicated to the remembrance of God;

(Lit is such a light) in houses, which Allah has enjoined to be raised and wherein His name is remembered: in them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings” (Qur’an 24: 36)

Al-Tabari explains that there are two opinions on what is meant by houses, one that it refers to the Mosques of Allah, the other opinion is of those who take a purely literal meaning, that it is houses of believers. Al-Tabari is of the first opinion and gives ten traditions that restrict it to the mosques, wherever they may be. He discards that they could be any house, as it is explained in the second part of the verse, that it can only be the mosque the place of worship where God’s name is invoked in the mornings and evenings. Ibn Kathir draws the link from the previous verse, which has compared the heart of the believer to a lamp. In this verse, the Quran states where they should be, and that is the mosques. He adds that it is houses that are only established for the purpose of worshipping and are kept away from any filth or any inappropriate words or deeds. He does not mention any other opinion on the matter. Al-Qurtubi also links it to the previous verse, and gives five different opinions on what is meant by *houses*. The first opinion is that it is any mosque, the second is that it is only the *houses of Bayt al-Maqdis*, the third opinion is the *houses of the Prophet*, the fourth is *all houses*, and finally the fifth opinion is that it is only *four mosques*; the Ka’bah in Makkah, the House of Jericho, the Mosque of Madinah, and the Mosque of Quba’. The opinion he favours is the first, and supports it by a prophetic tradition narrated by Anas that refers to mosques in general (al-Qurtubi 1964, vol12: 265-266). Al-Razi also gives the two possible opinions, and discards the opinion that it could be any house, since in there are things that happen in the house that are outside the remit of remembering and worshipping Allah, which would mean this is only possible in a mosque. He then mentions, of those who say it is the mosques are also divided into two groups, one group that specify certain mosques, which are the Ka’bah, the Mosque of Jerusalem, the Mosque of Madinah, and the Mosque of Quba’. He refutes this opinion by saying that they do not have any evidence to support their claim. Therefore, he favours the second group that it is the mosques, wherever they may be. He concludes with a saying of Ibn Abbas, that “*the Mosques are the houses of Allah on earth and are lit*

*like stars to the inhabitants of the sky, similar to the stars that the inhabitants of the earth see in the sky*” (al-Razi 2000 Vol24: 3-7). Maududi says that some commentators have taken ‘houses’ to mean mosques, while they interpret ‘enjoined to be raised’ to mean constructing mosques. Other commentators have taken ‘houses’ to mean houses of believers, and they interpret ‘enjoined to be raised’ to mean moral elevation. Maududi accepts the second argument and explains that the *shariah* in Islam does not restrict the place where God could be worshiped. He adds that the whole chapter is full of directives aimed at elevating one family and social life, therefore what is probably meant in houses is each individual house (Maududi 2001 Vol6: 254-257).

As can be seen from the above exegesis that they are split into two groups, most of them refer to the ‘houses’ as mosques, while the other group take it as places of residence. The researcher believes after looking at all the arguments presented by different exegetists, that it is any place, no matter where its location is, that God is remembered. If only the mosques were meant, then other words could have been used, such as *masājid* instead of *buyut*. It was left vague to mean both, the Houses of God –mosques- and also the houses of the believers, which in both God’s name is remembered. Therefore, it would include all the mosques mentioned by some of the scholars, the Ka’bah, Al-Aqsa Mosque, and all other mosques around the world, in addition to the residences of the believers, in which God is also remembered.

### ***Preventing access to mosques***

Within the exegesis of verse 114 of chapter al-Baqarah, revealed in Madinah, exegetists make reference to preventing access to Al-Aqsa Mosque. The verses are phrased in general terms, where they talk about those who prevent worshipers’ access to mosques and also try to ruin them;

And who is more unjust than those who prevent access to God’s places of worship, so that His Name be not remembered in them, and strives toward their destruction? They might never enter them, except in fear; for them is disgrace in this world; and in the Hereafter a tremendous punishment. (Qur’an 2: 114)

Al-Tabari starts off by explaining what is meant by a *masjid* linguistically, and that it is the place where the worshiper prostrates before God. He then explains what and who is meant by this verse, establishing that there are differences of opinion amongst scholars on this verse. He mentions two opinions; the first being the Mosque of Bayt al-Maqdis, i.e. Al-Aqsa Mosque, when the Christians helped Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the city after the Jews killed Prophet Yahya (John). The other opinion is that it was the Mosque of Makkah, and this is when they refused the prophet Muhammad entry to the city on the day of Hudaibiyyah. He concludes that it has to be one of these two mosques. He favours the first opinion, because the Pagans of Quraysh never tried to ruin the Mosque of Makkah, but took pride in being its custodians, although stopping the prophet from entering on some occasions. Also, the context of the verse refers to the Jews and Christians, and it does not refer in any way to the disbelievers of Quraysh.

Ibn Kathir only accepts that what is meant by *masajid* here is al-Masjid al-Haram in Makkah. He refutes the argument of al-Tabari, and the destruction of the mosque is not physical but moral. Since they have surrounded the Ka'bah with idols and stopped the believers from entering it, and what can be a greater evil than this. Al-Qurtubi starts off by saying what is referred to here as mosques are that of Bayt al-Maqdis and its *mahārib* (niches) and gives the other opinions on the matter. He, however, disagrees with previous scholars, and after giving an account of their arguments, he gives his opinion, that whosoever prevents access to any mosque till the Day of Judgment is what is meant here. He adds that the word *mosque* is mentioned in the plural form, and thus it cannot be restricted to a few mosques or a few people. But it can be accepted that when Jerusalem was destroyed it would be implied in this verse; also, when the prophet was banned from entering Makkah, both occasions would come under ruining mosques. He then continues to extract juristic ruling from this verse about prohibiting women from entering mosques, and the building of two mosques in one area, with the aim of dividing or ruining the other mosque (al-Qurtubi 1964, vol2:76-79).

Al-Razi explains that some take *masājid* to mean all mosques, and some take it to mean one specific mosque. He agrees with the second one, because the *masjid* is the place of prostration, and therefore a mosque will be *masājid* in plural. As for what is meant by ruining the mosque, could be understood in two ways, the first is banning the worshipers from entering, and the second is by destroying it. He rejects al-Tabari's argument, because when Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem, it was long before the birth of Christ, therefore there were no Christians to aid him. As for the other arguments, he also does not accept them, but adds a new argument; that is when the Muslims were in Madinah, the *Qiblah* (direction of prayer) was transferred from Jerusalem to Makkah, and the Jews were annoyed by this. Thus they tried to stop the Muslims from praying towards the Ka'bah and even tried to encourage some of the unbelievers to ruin the Ka'bah. This he sees to be the most acceptable argument, since the contexts of the other verses before and after, talk about the misbehaviour of both the Jews and Christians (al-Razi 2000 Vol4: 9-16). Qutb also argues that this verse and the following verses, relate to the *Qiblah* and the Jewish reaction to deter Muslims from turning towards Makkah. What he uses as evidence is the following verse that responds to those who debated with the Muslims that their prayers facing Jerusalem were worthless (Qutb 1991 vol1: 104-105).

This verse in its general wording seems to apply to any mosque that is being destroyed or access to it is restricted. Al-Razi take on al-Tabari is valid, since no Christians existed in 596BC to help Nebuchadnezzar to destroy neither Al-Aqsa Mosque nor the city.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the point al-Tabari and later al-Qurtubi, were trying to make is the disdain of Christians to the site of Al-Aqsa Mosque, knowing it should be venerated. Thus, reference is to the destruction of any mosque with special emphasis on important mosques (such as the Ka'bah and Al-Aqsa Mosque). The context of the verses is moreover in reference to Jews and Christians. Bashear argues that it may refer to the banning of Muslims getting to Al-Aqsa Mosque during the seventh century at the time of the Byzantines as part of a Muslim-Christian conflict in Jerusalem (Bashear 1989: 215-238).

Thus it may be argued during the Prophet Muhammad's time it would have been regarding the *Qiblah* to the Ka'bah as well as having no access to Al-Aqsa Mosque. The way the verse is worded it could be interpreted for different time periods; during the Crusades, it would have been the Christians who took Al-Aqsa and transformed it into a Church and stables, thus destroying it and preventing access to it. In our present time, al-Aqsa Mosque again fits the criteria as there are restrictions on Muslim access and plans to change its function thus ruining it. The second part of the verse also applies today that the unjust will never enter it "except in fear". This is evident with Zionists entering the al-Aqsa Mosque under heavy military protection as was the case with the former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon entering the mosque in October 2000 with thousands of soldiers protecting him!

### ***Figs and Olives***

One of the earliest Makkan chapters of the Quran that is believed to have made the first reference to Bayt al-Maqdis is chapter *al-Tin*. According to al-Zuhrī it was the 27<sup>th</sup> chapter to be revealed (al-Zuhrī 1988: 38). These verses start with the swearing of an oath by a number of things, due to their virtue and merit;

By the Fig and the Olive! and by Tur Sinin! and by this peaceful city!  
(Qur'an 95: 1-3)

Al-Tabari states clearly from the outset that there are many different opinions on what is meant by those verses. As for what is meant by 'By the Fig, and the Olive', he says there are two opinions on this, one that has a literal meaning, which is the fig that's eaten and the olive that oil is extracted from. To this opinion are: 'Ikrimah, Mujahid, and al-Hassan. As for the other opinion, that takes 'the Fig' to be in reference to the Mosque of Damascus, or the Mosque of Noah and 'the Olive' for Bayt al-Maqdis or its mosque. He narrates this opinion through Ibn-Abbas, Qatadah, and Ibn Zaid. Al-Tabari tends to go with the first opinion, but does not rule out the second opinion completely, as he explains, that those lands grow within them both the figs and olives. As for what is meant by *Tur Sinin*, there is some difference, as the word *Tur* means Mountain, and some take the word *Sinin* to mean good.

The majority of the narrations and the opinion of al-Tabari is that it is Mount Sinai. The third verse *'this peaceful city'* or *'city of security'* is taken to Makkah and its Mosque, as there is a unanimous agreement upon scholars on this (al-Tabari 1999 vol12:631-635).

Ibn Kathir narrates what al-Tabari narrates for each of the meanings, but does not illustrate which ones he is inclined to. He then adds that some scholars have taken this as places where God has sent his resolute messengers (*'Ulu al-'Aẓm*). The first being Bayt al-Maqdis, where God has sent Jesus (and other prophets), the second being Mount Sinai where Moses was given his revelation, and the last being Makkah where Muhammad was given revelation from God (Ibn Kathir 2000: 1517-1518). Al-Qurtubi also gives all the narrations of al-Tabari for what is meant by *'the fig and olive'* as a location, and adds a few more narrations. But then rejects them and takes the literal meaning and talks about the significance of these two plants, extracting juristic rulings, that Zakat is due on those trees, because of their great benefits. For the second verse, he accepts that it is Mount Sinai, but he believes that, God has sworn by this mountain, because it is part of *al-Sham* (Historical Syria), which God has blessed in the first verse in Chapter 17. As for the third verse, he accepts as all scholars do that it is Makkah (al-Qurtubi 1964, vol20:110-113).

Al-Razi starts off by explaining the reason for disagreement between scholars is a question that the *fig and olive* are not amongst the honourable things, so how can Allah have sworn by them. This is what caused the emergence of two opinions. He explains the opinion of the group who take the literal meaning, giving the virtues and benefits of these trees, and then adds more virtues that none of the above scholars have mentioned. He concludes that only its literal meaning should be taken, as God has sworn by them due to the immense benefit it extends. He still gives the evidence of the other group who take it to mean a location, and gives the different opinions of the locations for the fig and the olive and quotes Ibn Abbas that they are two mountains of the Holy Land, *the olive* being that of the Mosque of Bayt al-Maqdis. As for the other two verses, he accepts what most of the scholars have agreed to, that it is Mount Sinai, and Makkah respectively (al-Razi 2000

Vol32: 9-11). Qutb gives an account of the different opinions, but does not adopt one, he adds that the best approximation would be the location of the trees rather than the trees themselves; therefore, the three locations would bring different memories connected with religion and faith. Then he adds another assumption of what could be meant by it and that the two trees refer to the start of humans in heaven and their connection with earth (Qutb 1991 vol6: 3932-3933). Hawwa amongst modern exegetists as well as al-Qaradawi mentions that the majority agree that it is in reference to Bayt al-Maqdis (Hawwa 1985 vol11: 6589; al-Qaradawi 1997: 12)

As can be seen, there is quite a lot of confusion over this, and from the different evidence produced by each exegetist that at least the 'Olive' may refer to Bayt al-Maqdis, since it is renowned for it. One of the scholars mentioned above states there is no mountain called Mount *Tenna* or Mount *Zita*, but the mountain opposite al-Aqsa Mosque is called the Mount of Olive (*Jabal al-Zaytoon*). One of the old names for this mountain is Mount *Zita*, which would strengthen the opinion that al-Aqsa or Bayt al-Maqdis is meant here by the "Olive" if not both the Olive and Fig.

### ***A place so near***

In an episode connected with the Day of Judgment many exegetists associate verse 41 of the early Makkan chapter Qaaf with Al-Aqsa Mosque. The verse talks of the second blowing of the trumpet by an angel, which will cause all the dead to rise from their graves.

And listen for the Day when the Caller will call out from a place quite near  
(Qur'an 50: 41)

Al-Tabari states explicitly that this place is the Rock of Bayt al-Maqdis. He gives four narrations to support his opinion, and does not mention any other opinions or meaning to it. One of which he narrates from Qatadah, that *'the call will be from Bayt al-Maqdis, from the Rock, which is the centre of the world'*. Another narration he reports on the authority of Ka'b: *'the Rock is the closest part of the earth to the sky by 18 miles.'* Ibn Kathir narrates that God commands an Angel to call from the Rock of Bayt al-Maqdis. Al-Qurtubi states that the caller will call, as if he is calling in their ears, and also

narrates that the '*place quite near*' is the Rock of Bayt al-Maqdis, which he reiterates that it is said to be the centre of earth and the closest to the sky by 12 or 18 miles (al-Qurtubi 1964, vol17:27). Al-Razi discusses the nature of the call, and gives various explanations different from the above. When he comments on '*place quite near*' he refers to the reaching of its sound and not its source. He argues that everyone will be able to hear the sound closely (al-Razi 2000 Vol28: 162). Qutb like al-Razi, does not refer to a location, but rather that everyone will be able to hear this sound when it is called (Qutb 1991 vol6: 3366).

### Conclusion

This paper did not intend to discuss all the verses related to Islamicjerusalem, as it set out from its outset. Within the selected verses in this paper, there has been some confusion and disagreement amongst scholars, whether Bayt al-Maqdis is meant by all the verses. It can, however, be seen that the majority of exegetists mention opinions that associate Islamicjerusalem to the understanding of these verses and that places within the region of Bayt al-Maqdis have been part of their discussions, whether they agree with such opinions or not. In some of the verses, exegetists have provided consensus that reference had been to Islamicjerusalem, while in some of the verses they have differed and not reached a consensus. Within some modern exegesis, the geographical setting of events was not of much importance, such as within the work of Qutb, however Maududi on the other hand, paid attention to the geographical setting and discussed it at length similar to classical exegetists.

These findings contradict claims raised by Zionists undermining the importance of Bayt al-Maqdis and their claim that it has no mention within the Quran. It is clear that many verses have always been understood to refer to Islamicjerusalem. Many of these stories are a retelling of biblical stories, in both the Old and the New Testament. In actual fact, the Quran and Muslim exegetists and scholars, see that the Quran inherits and lays claim to all previous prophets, who are in turn regarded by the Quran as Muslims.<sup>8</sup> Thus their stories become part of the Muslim belief and

faith and to reject these connections is rejecting the biblical connection of these prophets with the Holy Land.

It was demonstrated that some of the discussed verses would apply to the region of Islamic Jerusalem as a whole or the Holy Land, while other verses would mean the city or Al-Aqsa Mosque in particular. It can also be deduced from the selected verses how exegetists have engaged with the rich history of Islamic Jerusalem in its past, as well as its status in future events to come. In the duration of this study, many other verses have been encountered which would need further elaboration to appreciate their relevance to Islamic Jerusalem. However, due to limitations of this paper, only the selected verses were investigated. It would be recommended that a thorough study of all verses associated with Islamic Jerusalem be investigated within a wider selection of exegetical works.

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## Endnotes

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- 1 The main bulk of this paper was written back in 2002, during my MLitt in Islamic Jerusalem Studies, at the University of Abertay Dundee.
- 2 Such as Quran 2:59 and 7:161, concerning the entry of the Israelites to the Holy land; the researcher started to explore this and found that it would require a full study on its own, as there are disagreements over what they refer to within the region of Islamic Jerusalem.
- 3 This is only one of the examples, which is mentioned in the Qur'an.
- 4 Muqatil ibn Sulayman is quoted to have said, when talking about Bayt al-Maqdis as a region that; "Jesus was born in Bayt al-Maqdis." (Ibn al-Faqih 1885:93-6; Ibn al-Jawzi 1989:71-73; Ibn al-Murajja 1995:260-2).
- 5 This narration is weak according to scholars of Hadith. (Ibn Al-Jawzi 1979: 120).
- 6 There is an account of an event taking place in Jericho, where Greek troops were stationed, mentioned by a contemporary Antiochus Strategos (see Conybeare 1910)
- 7 On Nebuchadnezzar see Al-Asali 1990: 63-67.
- 8 The Quran states that the term Muslim preceded seventh century Islam, indeed it was God that named believers Muslims well before (Quran 22:78). Abraham is regarded as a Muslim (Quran 3:67; 6:163; 2:127), the dying wish of Jacob to his sons is that they should not die except as Muslims (Quran 2:133), the disciples of Jesus declare that they are Muslims (Quran 3:52; 5:111).